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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 2115  
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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0303  
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SUBJECT: MOROCCO CELEBRATES WORLD REFUGEE DAY: AN OVERVIEW

Ref: RABAT 00319, CASABLANCA 00071, 07 CASABLANCA 00135

¶1. Summary: Although Morocco struggles with large populations of migrants and refugees, organizations such as UNHCR and the Friendship and Solidarity Organization (FSO) are moving towards further solidarity between Moroccan nationals and those who have adopted Morocco as their home. To this end, Morocco celebrated UN World Refugee Day on June 20 with two events: the UNHCR Mission to Morocco official ceremony in Rabat, and an FSO community event in Casablanca. As UNHCR reported progress in cooperation within government circles and local authorities, FSO members called for equal economic opportunities and a more sympathetic social posture of Moroccans toward migrants. End Summary.

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RABAT EVENT- UNHCR OFFICIAL CEREMONY  
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¶2. UNHCR Rabat organized a ceremony including speeches from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (through pre-recorded video); Johannes van der Klaauw, the UNHCR representative to Morocco; Ambassador Jawad El Hamdi, the MFA Director of Consular and Social Issues; and another UNHCR representative who read this year's UNSYG World Refugee Day speech.

¶3. According to the UNHCR, at the end of 2007, the number of worldwide displaced persons under UNHCR's care reached 25.1 million, of which 11.4 million are refugees. The Middle East and North Africa region hosted nearly 3 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations. The total number of refugees currently registered with UNHCR Rabat is 832, with the majority coming from the Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Iraq. Van der Klaauw noted that 189 of these refugees are children age seventeen and younger. UNHCR Morocco receives between 80-100 new refugee petitions each month. The rate of acceptance to receive formal refugee status is about 20%.

¶4. The GOM's goal to be "more equitable, fair, and efficient" is compatible with their actions since the July 2007 "accord de siege" granting diplomatic recognition of UNHCR Rabat. In addition to increased funding, UNHCR reports fewer cases of official refugees being deported. According to Anne Triboulet, UNHCR Rabat Protection Officer, the GOM previously pledged 75,000 USD annually to the UNHCR budget. Since last July, that number has increased to 500,000 USD for 2008 and 522,000 USD for 2009. Diplomatic cooperation between UNHCR and the GOM ministries has also markedly improved. Whereas

before the "accord de siege" UNHCR only had access to the MFA, now officers can make contact with officials from any of the government ministries. One of the most noticeable changes is the behavior of Moroccan police towards refugees. The refugees can present security-enhanced UNHCR cards if threatened with arrest; the police now check with UNHCR before deporting anyone with the card and UNHCR is unaware of any deportations of recognized refugees. Although the GOM still does not officially recognize UNHCR refugee documentation, the cards have more de facto value.

¶5. According to the MFA, since 2004, the GOM has dismantled more than 1,800 trafficking networks, and has voluntarily returned more than 8,000 migrants back to their homes. The GOM admits that it is difficult to distinguish between migrants who come only for economic benefits and those who truly need protection and asylum. Ambassador El Himdi emphasized the need to put into place a "procedure that is simple but effective" to correctly handle each migrant's situation. To this end, the GOM has sent a research team to Western Europe and to Mali to review their asylum procedures, with the ultimate goal of establishing a Moroccan asylum office.

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A CASABLANCA COMMUNITY WITH A NEW PERSPECTIVE  
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¶6. The Friendship and Solidarity Organization (L'Association Amiti et solidarit/FSO) is a Casablanca NGO established in December 2006 with the goal of creating social support systems between refugees and migrants and generating positive public opinion for these displaced persons. The Moroccan FSO members provide assistance in cases of human and legal rights violations, arbitrary arrests, problems between landlords and renters, and government bureaucracy. Moroccan public support is a relatively new concept. The FSO consists mainly of migrants from Africa and the Middle East.

¶7. The FSO distributes packets with basic necessities and medicines and provides access to lawyers, who volunteer their services. The Moroccans in the organization pay the legal expenses out of their own pocket, as well as medical and other living expenses (such as food and clothing). According to the president and founder, Lyoussi Souad, the FSO has assisted more than 200 local asylum-seekers and refugees, and answers regular calls for help during both the day and night.

¶8. The organization celebrated its second World Refugee Day event with an art exposition and a brief ceremony in Casablanca. Attendance consisted mostly of migrants with a few Moroccans.

¶9. The event included speeches from three migrants on their experiences in Morocco. While thanking the GOM for its hospitality and apologizing to the people of Morocco for any trouble they have caused, they all expressed frustration with their current situation and the need for "respect" as human beings, as well as access to education and jobs. The migrants also cited the need for the people of Morocco to recognize them as "refugees" in lieu of "illegal immigrants" as a significant step towards living normal lives.

¶10. Comment: The FSO's deep commitment to migrants/refugees is impressive. As the organization is only two and a half years old, there seems to be no government assistance or funding outside of the organization's members, but the event invitation sent to poloff included a grant request, indicating current fundraising attempts. Overall, the Casablanca event was quite positive, even though there was a slight underlying sense of tension whenever the presenters talked about not having enough "respect". The sub-Saharan migrants and refugees in the audience only seemed to partially agree with the more volatile comments; however, this stance is indicative of the attitude many migrants currently hold toward UNHCR because of frustration with their low economic, legal, and social status. End Comment.

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